

Master Metals procedure questioned

EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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Ohio EPA says handling of materials

CLEVELAND

Master Metals Inc. has improperly handled dusty lead-filled raw materials, and that could be a major cause of the high air-lead levels near the plant, according to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

During an inspection last week, the state EPA found that instead of keeping these materials in closed containers until they are fed into a furnace, Master Metals has dumped, shoveled and moved materials around company grounds in a way that repeatedly exposed them to the open air.

"They seemed genuinely surprised those operations might be causing problems," said James Orlemann, manager of the engineering section in Ohio EPA's Division of Air Pollution Control. "That in itself was surprising to us."

It has yet to be determined whether these practices violate state or federal environmental law. However, in 1991 and 1992 the state

EPA's Hazardous Waste Management Division cited Master Metals for using containers that didn't close adequately.

The company extracts lead from various materials and then sells it.

Master Metals contended yesterday that state inspectors have previously discussed material-handling issues, visited numerous times, and not raised concerns on the issues raised last week by Ohio EPA.

"We didn't identify it as a problem area," said Robert Casarona, lawyer for the W. 3rd St. company. "The company has been working hard in cooperation with the city and the state to eliminate dust concerns."

Without admitting improper operations, Master Metals agreed to make some immediate changes. Casarona said it now only accepts bulk loads of dusty materials that are already in containers and feeds them into the furnace while still in the containers. He also said the majority of materials on site are in containers and covered by tarps.

The question now is whether these changes will reduce air-lead levels sufficiently to avert a potential shutdown by Ohio EPA.

Last week's inspection came eight months after the Ohio EPA ordered Master Metals' immediate shutdown because of "health-threatening" violations of air standards.

Master Metals was later allowed to resume partial operations but was required to continue making several improvements to reduce air-lead levels. In addition, Ohio EPA said the company had to comply with federal air standards by this month or cease operations unless it could prove it is not the source of the excess levels.

Improvements have been made, and state officials said air-lead levels have fallen significantly, yet the levels at the company's property line continue to far exceed the standard.

"We're doing everything in our power to

bring those levels down and eliminate Master Metals' operation as the cause of lead emissions into the air," said Casarona.

A second question is whether Master Metals' material-handling procedures have violated a 1990 consent decree with the U.S. EPA.

That decree in part requires Master Metals to keep certain waste materials in secure containers.

U.S. EPA is currently evaluating Master Metals' handling process to determine if it violates the consent decree or federal regulations, and whether it is causing the continuing release of hazardous materials into the environment, according to Sheri Bianchin, an EPA environmental engineer in Chicago.

Casarona stressed that Master Metals is in compliance with the consent decree and contended that the company containers were approved by U.S. EPA.

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